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## UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY\*

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### 1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- *Explain the meaning, and scope of positive psychology;*
- *Differentiate between PP 1 and PP 2 waves of positive psychology;*
- *Define the concept of well-being; and*
- *Describe the relationship of positive psychology with other areas of psychology.*

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### 1.2 INTRODUCTION

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Positive psychology is a **new field of inquiry** within modern psychology that emerged two decades ago, with an exclusive emphasis on understanding the nature of **happiness** and **well-being** and the conditions which promote them across cultures and societies. The aim was to help people to lead a **good life**. Hence, we can say that the field of positive psychology had an applied orientation from the very inception.

Martin E. P. Seligman, Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and a Clinical Psychologist launched this new field of inquiry in the new

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\*Dr. Kiran Kumar Salagame, K., Former Professor of Psychology, Department of Studies in Psychology, University of Mysore, Mysuru

millennium. As President of the American Psychological Association in 1998, he chose Positive Psychology as the presidential theme for his tenure. He had a strong feeling that psychology has too long focused on studying negative emotions like anger, anxiety and depression and treated mental illness from a 'disease model.' He recognized that the discipline has not paid much attention to study what makes people to experience joy, satisfaction and contentment; to be healthy, resilient and grow; and to lead a meaningful, successful and worthy life. Therefore, he chose to usher in a new era of research in psychology discipline in the new Millenium.

Though Seligman presented his initial ideas on this new field in his presidential address at APA in 1998, they got crystalized in two meetings, one in January 1999 and another in January 2000 at Akumal, Mexico. The meetings were attended by a select group of psychologists who shared his vision. They drafted the first manifesto which has come to be known as "Akumal Manifesto"/ "Positive Psychology Manifesto." It was authored by Kenneth Sheldon, Barbara Fredrickson, Kevin Rathunde, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Jonathan Haidt (<https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/opportunities/conference-archives>). The vision and mission of this new field was formally made public to the academic community in the special issue of *American Psychologist* (January 2000) with the focal theme "Positive Psychology" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). That issue included articles on pleasure and happiness, quality of life, subjective and psychological well-being, actualization of potentials and optimal functioning, creativity, optimism, hope, altruism, forgiveness, gratitude and spirituality.

Another publication, with the title "On happiness and human potentials: a review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being" (Ryan and Deci, 2001) in the Annual Review of Psychology catalyzed the interest among psychologists in this new field of inquiry. For the first time these two important publications brought together under one broad heading a wide range of previous researches that were conducted independently and separated in time and space by several investigators for many decades. Since then, 'Positive Psychology' has become a rallying point for many researchers already working on related themes.

Ed Diener's previous work on "subjective well-being" (SWB) (Diener, 1984) and Carol Ryff's publications on "psychological well-being" (PWB) (Ryff, 1989) became the primary or central foci of research, debate and discussion in the initial years because they had already worked for nearly two decades on them. They had also developed tools to measure those constructs (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In addition, Martin Seligman (optimism), Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (flow), Charles Snyder and Shane Lopez (hope), Jeff Clifton (strengths), Cristopher Peterson (character and virtue), Barbara Frederickson (positive emotions), Sonja Lyubomirsky (subjective happiness), Todd Kashdan (well-being) and Michael Steger (meaning and purpose) were some of the first few psychologists who published important books and research articles in quick succession in the initial year on their work and of others. All of them contributed for the development by providing the initial research inputs to define this new field. Their work served as the primary reference to outline its aims, objectives and scope. In addition, many products and practical techniques that are useful for practice have also

been developed (see for example, (<https://positivepsychology.com/positive-psychology-interventions/>)).

As more researchers took interest in this field over the past two decades, the vision and scope of positive psychology has expanded further. Now positive psychology has passed its teenage age in its developmental phase, and has entered adulthood in 2021! In these two decades, the field has grown enormously with hundreds of books and thousands of articles published. They include both well researched scientific publications and also self-help books on how to be happy and achieve well-being. Thus, it has become hugely popular all over the globe, perhaps more than any other branch of modern psychology among researchers, mental health professionals, life coaches, educationists, management experts, and also among lay people because of its direct relevance to our day-to-day living.

Seligman and his associates in their initial thrust on positive aspects of human existence appear to have not paid much attention to the value of human adversities and suffering for human growth and defining well-being. This came under criticism from quite a few psychologists. Most vocal of them is Paul T Wong, a Canadian Professor of Psychology and also a Clinical Psychologist. He actively promoted his vision of positive psychology, known as *Existential Positive Psychology*. Wong emphasizes on the importance of pain, suffering and sorrow in human existence and their relevance in defining what is happiness, well-being and meaningful living (Wong, 2011). It cannot be said that Seligman neglected them totally. On the other hand, Seligman preferred to emphasize more on the positive side of human experiences. However, Wong, who is an Existential-humanistic psychologist, chose to highlight the relations between suffering and meaningfulness to well-being. Further researches resulted in new insights and shifts in the emphasis.

Thus, at present, there are two visions of positive psychology which are referred to as “**two waves**”- PP1 (Positive Psychology 1 - Seligman’s version) and PP2 (Positive Psychology 2 - Wong’s version). Hence, the definition, aim and scope of this field have to be understood in the context of these two major trends. It should be noted here that PP 2 is nearer to Indian perspectives on life and well-being. In this Unit you will be introduced to the meaning and scope of positive psychology; the context or background in which this new field emerged; and its relation to other social sciences and to other branches of psychology.

### **Self Assessment Questions 1**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ chose Positive Psychology as the presidential theme for his tenure as President in the American Psychological Association.
2. What is ‘Akumal Manifesto’?
3. The concept of Psychological well-being (PWB) was proposed by \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Wong’s vision of positive psychology is known as \_\_\_\_\_.

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## 1.3 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY 1 – AIMS AND SCOPE (MARTIN SELIGMAN)

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According to Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) the agenda of Positive Psychology are as follows.

- To articulate a vision of good life that is empirically sound while being understandable and attractive.
- To show what actions can lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities.
- To help document - (i) what kinds of families result in children who flourish, (ii) what work settings support the greatest satisfaction among workers, (iii) what policies result in the strongest civic engagement, (iv) and how people's lives can be most worth living.

The PP manifesto says (Sheldon, et al., 2000) if one has to meet the objectives and achieve the aim of positive psychology “one must consider optimal functioning at multiple levels, including biological, experiential, personal, relational, institutional, cultural and global.” What does it mean? How can that be done? As per the manifesto we have to study:

- a) “The dynamic relations between processes at these levels.”
- b) “The human capacity to create order and meaning in response to inevitable adversity.”
- c) “The means by which ‘the good life,’ in its many manifestations, may emerge from these processes.”

As per the Positive Psychology Manifesto, “Positive Psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning.” It aims to “discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive.” The manifesto further states that positive psychology “represents a new commitment on the part of research psychologists to focus attention upon the sources of psychological health, thereby going beyond prior emphasis upon disease and disorder.” (Sheldon, et al., 2000, p.1). Another early pioneer of this field, late Christopher Peterson (1950-2012) says positive psychology is “the scientific study of what goes right in life” and what makes “life most worth living” (2006, p.4). To achieve these objectives, Seligman established a Positive Psychology Center in the University of Pennsylvania, in the United States. At present the vision and mission statements related to the definition, aims and scope of positive psychology are on the websites of the Department of Psychology and of the Positive Psychology Center (PPC). They are reproduced below because they provide a clear idea of this new field.

“Positive Psychology is the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.” (<https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>).

“Positive Psychology aims to understand and build the emotions, and the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. Positive Psychology has three central concerns: positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions.” - Angela Duckworth, Paul Rozin, and Martin Seligman. (<https://psychology.sas.upenn.edu/positive-psychology>).

According to Duckworth, Rozin, and Seligman, the three central concerns of positive psychology involve,

- “Understanding positive experiences or positive emotions consists in the study of ‘contentment’ with the ‘past’; ‘pleasure’ in the ‘present’; and ‘hope’ for the ‘future’;”
- “Understanding positive individual traits means the study of strengths and virtues viz., the capacity to love, valour, altruism, grit, creativity, curiosity, integrity, moderation, self-control, spirituality and humor;” and
- “Understanding positive institutions involves the study of the strong families, communities, corporations and the virtues that nourish them such as justice, responsibility, civility, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, purpose and tolerance.” (<https://psychology.sas.upenn.edu/positive-psychology>).

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## 1.4 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY 2 – AIMS AND SCOPE (PAUL T. WONG)

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Dr. Wong is the Founding President of the Meaning-Centered Counselling Institute, Inc. (MCCI) and the originator of ‘meaning-centered counselling and therapy’ (MCCT), an ‘integrative existential positive psychotherapy.’ In Wong’s view, suffering is as much required for flourishing and growth as the experience of positive emotions. Therefore, he terms his vision as “Existential Positive Psychology (2.0) of Flourishing Through Suffering.” He also terms it as second wave of PP (see <http://www.drpaulwong.com/recommended-readings-for-the-existential-positive-psychology-2-0-of-flourishing-through-suffering/>-posted Nov 16, 2020). As he states:

“PP is intrinsically existential because it is concerned with such fundamental questions about human existence as: What is the good life? What makes life worth living? How can one find happiness? However, these existential questions cannot be fully addressed through PP research alone without recognizing people’s existential anxieties. A maturing PP needs to return to its existential-humanistic roots to rediscover the richness of the lived experience and the many pathways to meaning in life.” (Wong, 2016, p. 1).

Though Seligman’s vision and approach to PP has become very popular, it has been criticized for the overemphasis on positive emotions and undermining the significance of negative emotions experienced in our life. Existential-Humanistic psychologists are of the view that both pleasure and pain contribute to our well-being. Viktor Frankl, a German psychiatrist who survived the Holocaust during Hitler’s regime and later developed his therapeutic approach known as ‘Logotherapy’ argued that there is a strong relationship between depression, anxiety, and meaninglessness. Based on his personal experiences and of his fellow prisoners in the ‘concentration camp’ he realized that when a person loses all hope and a sense of purpose in life, he tends to become depressed



and gives up. On the other hand, if he can take a perspective on his pain and suffering and searches for a meaning even in that negative circumstance, he can grow over that and feel a sense of well-being. Based on this he wrote the famous book *Man's Search for Meaning*. In his view in the absence of meaning people try to fill the void in two ways: (i) by indulging in hedonistic pleasures and in the pursuit of power and materialism; (ii) and also by experiencing hatred, boredom, or neurotic obsessions and compulsions (Frankl, 1992, p. 143). Therefore, Paul Wong has focused on 'suffering' and 'meaning' as other important aspects in addition to the concepts discussed by Seligman as key themes of Positive Psychology.

Further, Wong notes that,

"Existential positive psychology (EPP) or positive existential psychology represents a natural amalgamation between PP and existential psychology. Basically, EPP addresses a few fundamental questions about self-identity and the human condition of striving for happiness within the constraints of reality." (2016, p.1).

Some of the fundamental questions of the Existential PP include (1) "Who am I? What defines me?" (2) "How can I be happy? Why am I so dissatisfied with life?" (3) "What is the good life? Is this all there is to life?" (4) "What should I do with my life? What is my calling?" (5) "How do I make the right choices? How do I know that I am making the right decision regarding career and relationships?" (6) "Where do I belong? Why do I feel so alone in this world? How can I develop deep and meaningful relationships?" (7) "What is the point of striving when life is so short?" (Wong, 2016, p.1).

Thus, eight sources of a meaningful life have been repeatedly found through research: (1) Happiness and fulfilment, (2) Achieving something worthwhile, (3) Intimacy: marriage and family, (4) Good relationship with friends and people, (5) Self-acceptance, (6) Self-transcendence or altruism, (7) Religion and (8) Fairness or justice, (Wong 2011). Majority of human beings face such questions sometime or other irrespective of gender, race, color, socio-economic-status, caste, nationality, and others. Finding satisfactory answers to such questions give us a direction and meaning for our life and also satisfaction. On the other hand, failure to resolve such questions can cause anxiety and depression and may lead to suicide.

### **Self Assessment Questions 2**

1. Positive Psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning. True/False
2. Name the three central concerns of positive psychology.
3. Who has talked about 'flourishing through suffering'?
4. Logotherapy has been proposed by whom?
5. What is the second wave of PP?

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## 1.5 THE CONCEPT OF WELL-BEING

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Well-being is a central concept in positive psychology. Shah and Marks (2004, p. 2) state that, “Well-being is more than just happiness. In addition to feeling satisfied and happy, well-being means developing as a person, being fulfilled, and making a contribution to the community.”

Prior to Seligman, other researchers, mainly Bradburn, Ed Diener and Carol Ryff have already discussed about happiness and well-being and made significant contributions. Bradburn (1969) noted that high psychological well-being indicates more of positive affect than negative affect and low psychological well-being indicates the vice-versa. Ed Diener’s (1984) concept of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) is associated with two elements (1) positive and negative affect (2) and life satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) with five items only is developed by Diener (Diener, et al., 1985) and is the most widely used measure for research on well-being. The two kinds of affect are not opposite ends of a dimension, rather they are two distinct dimensions and each person can have both the affects. It is the predominance of one over the other that is indicative of high or low well-being. In positive psychology literature, SWB is associated with the ancient Greek notion of hedonia which implies seeking pleasure. Throughout his career Ed Diener worked on understanding and measuring SWB and published more than 200 articles and also a few books (Eid & Larsen, 2008).

Another important contribution came from Carol Ryff (1989) who questioned the idea of limiting the notion of well-being to pleasure seeking or happiness as is usually called. Ryff’s concept of Psychological Well-being (PWB) goes beyond one’s affective experiences. It focuses on knowing to what extent a person has been able to develop one’s self in terms of six different psychological dimensions viz., autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. PWB is equated with the Greek notion of eudaimonia which means seeking meaning life. Ryff’s concept of PWB is informed by the Humanistic psychologists’ thrust on human potential and self-actualization. “Psychological Well-Being Scale” (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) is another most employed instrument in research on well-being next only to SWLS. It has many versions with differing number of items.

Seligman’s PERMA is the newer addition to this. Dodge, et al., (2012, p.226) note that Seligman’s “new theory of well-being concentrates...on elements of well-being,” which he believes are “a set of building blocks for a flourishing life” They are: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA).” (Italic added for emphasis). Seligman himself seems to have changed the goal post of positive psychology from his first book (Authentic Happiness -Seligman, 2002) to his second book written after a decade (Flourishing – Seligman, 2011). He states,

“I used to think that the topic of positive psychology was happiness. I now think that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing.” (Italic added for emphasis. Not in the original). (Seligman, 2011, p. 13-15, cited in - Dodge, Daly, Huyton and Sanders, 2012).

Seligman asserts,

“Well-being theory denies that the topic of positive psychology is a real thing; rather the topic is a construct – well-being – which in turn has several measurable elements, each a real thing, each contributing to well-being, but none defining well-being.” (Seligman, 2011, p. 13-15, cited in - Dodge, Daly, Huyton and Sanders, 2012). (*Italics added for emphasis*).

Well-being is thus related more to Aristotle’s idea of eudaimonia and is considered a multi-dimensional construct.

### **Self Assessment Questions 3**

1. Name the two elements associated with the concept of Subjective Well-Being (SWB).
2. How many dimensions are there in Ryff’s concept of Psychological Well-being (PWB)?
3. What does PERMA consist of?
4. Well-being is more related to Aristotle’s idea of eudaimonia.  
True/ False

## **1.6 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

There are two ways of writing the history of a discipline viz., internal history and external history (Leahey, 2004). Internal history refers to the emergence of a field and the developments within it from its inception up to a particular period at which time the historian wishes to write. External history goes outside the disciplinary boundaries and looks at the social and cultural events and the context in which a particular discipline emerged and what are the influencing events. Here an external historical approach is followed in which not only you will learn how and when positive psychology emerged but you will also learn in what context it emerged and how it is relevant locally and globally.

Happiness, well-being, flourishing, good life, meaningful life and others are not new concepts and topics in themselves. Perhaps these topics have been the subject of human inquiry ever since man acquired the ability for self-reflexivity and began to contemplate on the meaning and purpose of one’s existence. Globally humans have developed some notion of happiness over several millennia (Lomas, Case, Cratty and Vander Weele, 2021). Therefore, it is best to say positive psychology has a long past but a short history, as it is said about many other topics in our discipline. In psychology,

Humanistic psychologists had already dwelt on the issues related to human potential and quality of human life in many ways and most importantly in terms of self-actualization and growth. Abraham Maslow (1954) had already used ‘positive psychology’ in his discussions on motivation and personality. Carl Rogers’s concepts of acceptance, unconditional positive regard and genuineness; James Bugental’s emphasis on authenticity, Sidney Jourard’s research on self-disclosure and many others were discussed under the notion of “healthy personality” (Jourard & Landsman, 1980). In other words, there already existed a background to think about positive aspects of human



existence. What differentiates Seligman's vision is his insistence on empirical and quantitative methodology that is characterized by "nomothetic approach", as against humanistic thinkers who laid stress on "idiographic approach" that emphasizes on uniqueness of individual persons. Humanistic thinkers' emphasis on phenomenological approach to study of subjective experiences in understanding an individual led to marginalization, because the quantitative and experimental approach of mainstream scientific psychology seem to be much easier to carry out.

The immediate antecedent factors that provoked Seligman to think about positive psychology is his interaction with his five year old daughter Nikki. The incident is as follows: One day he and his daughter were doing some garden work and he got irritated by her playful and jovial behavior in carrying out the task. That interaction is reproduced here as described by him.

"Daddy, I want to talk to you."

"Yes, Nikki?"

"Daddy, do you remember before my fifth birthday? From the time I was three to the time I was five, I was a whiner. I whined every day. When I turned five, I decided not to whine anymore. That was the hardest thing I've ever done. *And if I can stop whining, you can stop being such a grouch.*" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 6). (Italic added for emphasis).

He says, it led to a shift, in himself as well as in his thinking about the discipline, from negative emotions to positive emotions eventually to the emergence of positive psychology.

Another important incidence that led to the launch of a new field was Seligman's chance meeting with Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi in a beach resort. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) had been working on the concept of "flow" which is related to "optimal human experience" and functioning. Both of these persons had not met earlier though they knew about each other and their works. In this chance meeting they spent days together discussing about the status of psychology as a discipline, the direction it has taken and finally agreed that there is a need to focus on the positive aspects of human nature.

Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) note that psychology concentrated more on "repairing damage within a disease model of human functioning" and "neglects the fulfilled individual and the thriving community." Further, they observe that "Psychologists have scant knowledge of what makes life worth living" and they know "very little about how normal people flourish under more benign conditions". The focus of psychology, David Myers (2000) says, is "on illness more than health;" "on aggression more than love;" and "on fear more than courage." Myers noted that from the year 1887 to 2000, Psychological Abstracts of APA published nearly 80,000 articles on depression, more than 50,000 articles on anxiety, about 10,000 articles on anger. On the other hand, articles on joy, happiness, and life satisfaction ranged between 800 to a few thousands. It was this anomaly, which made Seligman to say that we as specialists have focused too much on negativity. To set this right, to "begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities", they launched this field.

### 1.6.1 Positive Psychology and Other Social Sciences

Since the main theme of positive psychology is happiness, well-being and flourishing, this field of inquiry is related to other disciplines in social sciences such as economics, political sciences, and sociology on the one hand, and to medicine, psychiatry and public health on the other. In general, we can say that positive psychology has relation to any discipline or a branch within it that has something to do with human welfare. Much of the earlier studies that were conducted by social scientists on 'quality of life' focused on certain 'social indicators' that ensures a better life. Such indicators include socio-economic conditions of a society such as GDP, infrastructure development, civic amenities, health and hygiene, crime rate, absence of religious conflicts, governance and others that distinguish developed nations from developing and underdeveloped nations. Those studies were conducted in the past and are still being conducted with primary focus on what are called 'objective factors.' However, in the past few decades, research on social indicators have shown that objective factors alone will not suffice to ensure happiness and well-being. When we examine the social climate as the context for the emergence of this new branch, it is obvious that many of the indicators of developed nations are not leading to the sense of satisfaction. The USA is one of the super-rich countries and also known as super power in the world. Yet, how is that Seligman and others felt the need to usher in this new field of inquiry?

Paul Wachtel (1989) also a Clinical Psychologist brought out this very well in his book titled *The Poverty of Affluence: A Psychological Portrait of the American Way of Life*. The author provides a diagnostic insight to the American situation and the quality of life lived there. This work highlights the shadow side and the sad state of American life. Another piece of evidence is the many cross-national studies on the relationship between economy and the index of life satisfaction. It is found that many economically poor countries are at par with economically rich countries on the index of life satisfaction (Diener & Oishi, 2000). For example, one study (cited in Seligman, 2002) shows that USA with Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of 100 on a scale of 1-100, has a life satisfaction score of 7.75 on a scale of 1-10. The same study shows that India has a life satisfaction score of 6.70 even though PPP of India is only 5. Just a difference of one point on life satisfaction index for a difference of 95 points on PPP! We are more satisfied than Americans though our country is considered as one of the poor and developing nations! More commonly economic wealth and political power are valued as important contributors for a better quality of life. GDP of a country is regarded as one of the important indicators of a nation's development. FORBES magazine keeps listing out the richest persons in the world and in a particular country periodically. Surprisingly, however, the clinical observations and empirical evidences show that this is not true. Money and power need not necessarily assure a better quality of living and well-being beyond a certain point. It follows the 'law of diminishing returns.' Therefore, now it is increasingly realized that happiness and well-being are not contingent upon the economic conditions and material affluence alone. Therefore, a geographically small neighbouring country like Bhutan, came up with the idea of GNHI (Gross National Happiness Index) as an alternative to GDP to understand the overall development of a nation and the extent of well-being experienced by its people.

### 1.6.2 GDP to GNHI - Towards “Holistic Approach to Human Development”

The term ‘gross national happiness’ was first coined by the 4th King of Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, in 1972 when he declared, “Gross National Happiness (GNH) is more important than Gross Domestic Product (GDP).” The concept implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of well-being.” The GNH Index (GNHI) includes nine domains (1) Psychological well-being, (2) Health, (3) Education, (4) Time use, (5) Cultural diversity and resilience, (6) Good governance, (7) Community vitality, (8) Ecological diversity and resilience, and (9) Living standards. This idea was further developed by the Government of Bhutan in their Center for Bhutan Studies. A revised version of GNHI was released with 33 indicators in the 9 domains. These indicators and domains aim to emphasize different aspects of well-being, and different ways of meeting underlying human needs. GNHI was adopted through a resolution in the United Nations in the year 2011 by the support of 68 member states. The resolution calls for a “holistic approach to development” aimed at promoting sustainable happiness and well-being (<https://ophi.org.uk/policy/gross-national-happiness-index/>). Now Venezuela, UAE and India have established separate ministries/departments of happiness. Madhya Pradesh government first established such a department in India in 2017. Their motto is to enhance *ānanda*.

### 1.6.3 Value Crisis

Positive psychology also emerged in partial response to the value crisis experienced on the moral and ethical front in the American society and hence it is admittedly a cultural phenomenon (see Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2002). It has resulted in a renewed focus on the study of virtues and character strengths. Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) has become very popular among researchers. It is a systematic and comprehensive approach to the study of character strengths informed by all the major and lesser-known spiritual traditions of the world which include Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Judaism, Islam, Sufism, Upanishads, Yoga, and many others. It is the best example of the response by psychologists for the value crisis experienced in American society. It has been translated in many languages and also cross-culturally validated in many countries (see <https://www.viacharacter.org/researchers/assessments/via-is>). A Hindi translated version of this inventory (Singh & Choubisia, 2009) is also available.

Thus, we have to understand the emergence and subsequent development of positive psychology in this background of American context. To certain extent the American context exemplifies the general Western situation where materialism has dominated the cultural ethos as compared to cultures in East and Asia. However, it has global implications because all over the world national governments are striving hard to better the quality of living and search for happiness in the material world.

#### Self Assessment Questions 4

1. What does the external history of a discipline refer to?
2. Phenomenological approach focuses on studying the subjective experiences in understanding an individual. True /False
3. The concept of 'Flow' is attributed to whom?
4. Which country has used the term Gross National Happiness (GNH) first?

## 1.7 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND OTHER AREAS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Within the discipline of psychology there are many branches which have contributed insights for the development of positive psychology. Baumgardner and Crothers (2014) identify the following as most important: health psychology, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, personality psychology, social psychology and the psychology of religion. Let us briefly review their significant influences.

### • Health Psychology and Positive Psychology

Research findings from various studies affirm that stress, anger, resentment, anxiety and worry have the potential health threatening effects. A variety of related research show that those who undergo long periods of extreme stress are more vulnerable to illness. It is found that negative emotional states, the brain and rest of the nervous system, the endocrine system and the immune system interact in a complex way leading to negative impact on our health. "Psychoneuroimmunology", a new field of research came into existence in the 1980s to understand these complex pathways and mechanisms. Investigations in this new field have documented that the mind and attitude play a significant role in the functioning of the immune system, leading to illness.

In another direction Barbara Fredrickson investigated the relation between positive emotions and our sense of well-being. She proposed what she calls "broaden and build theory." According to her theory emotions like joy, contentment, interest, love, and pride "all share the ability to broaden people's thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources" (2001, p. 219). It is also observed that expressions of positive emotions in early life have a significant relation to our longevity. Danner, Snowdon and Friesen, (2001) found from their longitudinal research on 180 nuns that the relation between probability of survival to an advanced age and the early-life expression of positive emotions appeared very strong. They found that the most cheerful of the nuns in the study live a full decade longer than the least cheerful. It is now known as "Nun Study." In this background the role of positive emotions in maintaining and enhancing our health has gained significance. Baumgardner & Crothers (2014, p. 7) state as follows: "According to the results of the Nun Study, the phrase, "don't worry, be happy" is excellent advice. You may live longer!". Therefore, *studying positive emotions* is one of the three important foci of positive psychology.



- **Clinical Psychology and Positive Psychology**

The relation of clinical psychology to positive psychology can be traced back to how the concepts of mental health changed over the years from an exclusive focus on removal of symptoms of an illness to building positive health.

*First*, the clinical psychologists, followed the early ‘medical model.’ They were preoccupied in removing symptoms in treating a mental disorder to restore normalcy and health because the absence of illness was considered as the primary criterion of health. However, a famous psychiatrist, Thomas Szasz, vehemently opposed this idea. In his classic paper *Myth of Mental Illness*, Szasz argued that any disease, disorder and illness must have a definite location and relation with the pathology of our anatomy, physiology and biochemistry. It must be definitely related to any one of the organ systems in our body. That is, to consider something as an illness there must be an organic/physical basis. Since, in many so called mental disorders and illnesses one cannot demonstrate any such physical basis or relationship he argued that we cannot consider them as diseases. We have to treat them as “problems of living.” *Second*, with the emergence of Behavior Therapy and Behavior Modification many of the abnormal behavior considered as mental illness were viewed as either ‘learning deficits or ‘excess’ in learning due to faulty conditioning –classical and instrumental. *Third*, in Cognitive Therapy symptoms of many mental disorders are viewed as manifestation of ‘irrational beliefs and thinking’ leading to negative emotions. *Fourth*, Humanistic psychologists saw them as ‘failure in a person’s growth’ and ‘inability to actualize one’s potentials.’ *Fifth*, Systems therapists viewed many mental illnesses as manifestations of a ‘dysfunctional family constellation.’ Many such insights shifted the perspective from looking only at causal relation between symptoms and underlying pathology to what is healthy in a person. Thus, reduction of symptoms was not the only concern of a counsellor or therapist. Even helping the person to develop what is healthy and strength in a person was also considered important leading to the concept of ‘positive mental health.’

Marie Jahoda (1958) in her classic work *Current Concepts of Positive Mental Health*, identified the following six approaches to the definition of positive mental health: (1) attitude toward own self; (2) growth, development, and self-actualization; (3) integration; (4) autonomy; (5) perception of reality; and (6) environmental mastery. As we discussed already Carol Ryff incorporated some of the above into the construct of psychological well-being (PWB). But we do not have well developed models of positive health and what characterizes positive mental health, just as we have models of psychopathology and diagnostic categories like DSM and ICD. In other words, “what personal characteristics and what type of life define the extreme opposite of mental illness— a state Keyes and Haidt (2003) call “flourishing?”. We have yet to find out what they are. Therefore, another goal of positive psychology is to ***establish criteria and a language defining the presence of positive mental health*** that parallels our current criteria and language for describing and diagnosing mental illness.” (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014, p. 7).

- **Developmental Psychology and Positive Psychology**

What conditions in life facilitate healthy development is a long-standing issue



in developmental psychology? The debate about ‘heredity vs. environment’ and ‘nature vs. nurture’ is well known. Developmental psychologists have studied for long the role of environments – physical, psychological and social, on the development of humans at various age period. The role of deprivation and disadvantage (cultural, social, economic and educational); of family environment (parental conflicts, abuse and alcoholism); and of the incidences of mental illness in the family with a genetic history have been studied. in relation to the physical, emotional, cognitive, moral and ethical and social development. It is found that any kind of such adverse circumstances can affect one or more aspects mentioned leading to certain deficits. However, as Baumgardner & Crothers (2014, p.7) note all such studies were carried out from the assumption of a “deficit model” and these “assumptions began to change in the 1970s when many psychiatrists and psychologists drew attention to the amazing resilience of certain children and adults subjected to potentially debilitating life challenges (Masten, 2001).” It is now found that cases of resilience i.e., “good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development (Masten, p. 228)” are more common than previously supposed.

Another concept which has demonstrated the relation of development psychology to positive psychology is “posttraumatic growth” (PTG). It is the opposite of “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD). Earlier it was mentioned that all persons who face adversities in life and stressful situation will not react to them in the same way. While some who are vulnerable to stress may develop various kinds of illness, there are good number of people who come clean and stronger from such adversities. Research evidence is accumulating as the shift in focus from PTSD to PTG has occurred. It is found that “positive growth can occur as a result of traumatic experiences like serious illness, loss of a loved one, or a major accident or disability (Ryff & Singer, 2003a). In the aftermath of such events, many people report a greater appreciation for life and their loved ones, an increased sense of personal strength, and more clarity about what is most important in life.” (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014, p.7). Research documenting the amazing resilience of ordinary people facing difficult life circumstances” and exhibit personal growth have increased and that highlights a major theme of positive psychology, viz., *studying human strengths*.

- **Personality Psychology and Positive Psychology**

The reading of the history of psychology of personality shows that several decades ago the terms ‘virtue’ and ‘character’ were considered as not scientific because they are value loaded terms. Hence, the term ‘personality’ was introduced by Gordon Allport as a neutral and scientific term in their place. Today we have come a full circle reclaiming those terms as valid concepts of scientific investigation! (See Section 1.7.3 on Value Crisis). Not only them, topics like altruism, forgiveness, gratitude, love, courage, creativity, meaning, wisdom, spirituality, transcendence and many others which Humanistic Psychology associated with Self-Actualization have also been studied with a new vigor.

There are many critics of Positive Psychology who point out that this field of inquiry has its foundation in Humanistic Psychology but has not been acknowledged sufficiently (Froh, 2004). Ever since Humanistic psychologists like Kurt Goldstein, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Clark Moustakas, Sydney Jourard and many others emphasized on self-actualization and growth there

has been a thrust on understanding what characterizes ‘healthy personality’ (Coan, 1974; Jourard & Landsman, 1980). A healthy person is regarded as one who is free from neurotic conflicts and is able to function optimally actualizing his/her innate potentials. Maslow (1971) distinguished between ‘Deficiency-needs’ and ‘Being-needs.’ Unlike persons who are engaged only in fulfilling their deficiency needs to maintain some kind of homeostasis, those persons who function to fulfill their Being- needs manifest healthy personality characteristics. Many of those characteristics are now termed as *positive traits* and *positive strengths*, which is another important focus of positive psychology. They include both temperament and personality traits which are related to individual well-being. Important ones among them are hope and optimism, self-esteem, extraversion, a positive outlook on life, and pursuit of meaningful goals.

- **Social Psychology and Positive Psychology**

By now perhaps you have understood how our happiness and sense of well-being is dependent on many factors. We as humans do not live in isolation and we are always acting and interacting with others. Therefore, it is a matter of common sense that our health, happiness, and well-being depend as much on our relationships with others as on our own innate nature and material aspects of our life. Our interpersonal and social relations contribute quite a lot for our experience of well-being as we keep growing old.

Importance of satisfying interpersonal and social relationships and social support from significant others is amply demonstrated in many studies. Such satisfying relationships are found in happy marriage and having intimate friends. Corey M. Keyes (1998) postulated the concept of “social well-being” with five dimensions validated by empirical investigations. They are: social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization and social acceptance.

Further, social psychologists have also sensitized to the fact that there are cultural differences in the understanding of what constitutes happiness and well-being. Concepts of happiness in America and Japan, for example, are quite different. In addition, social psychologists have also found that affluence and materialism among many so called developed societies with a consumer culture as in the United States, for example, has a dark side to it. It is also found that people who are after material wealth and fame only and sacrifice fulfillment of important psychological needs may also sacrifice their own happiness and life satisfaction. Studies show that increase in income like the sudden wealth of lottery winners, has only short term effects (Diener & Oishi, 2005b). In the Indian context our joint family system can provide satisfying relationship provided it does not become too restrictive of personal growth leading to a feeling of emotional suffocation.

- **The Psychology of Religion and Positive Psychology**

Religion, irrespective of which denomination it is, has two primary aspects (1) faith in a God or Divinity and associated beliefs and practices; and (2) moral and ethical code of conduct prescribed to be adhered to. In recent years, a distinction is made between religion and spirituality as well. Religion is often employed when one refers to the following of organized and institutionalized faith system

by practicing the customs and rituals prescribed. Spirituality is employed when one refers to an individual's desire and efforts to connect with a superior universal principle through expansion of one's awareness, which transcends the limited perspective of different religions. The role of religious practices such as prayer and worship are examined in researches on healing of various physical and mental disorders. On the other hand, moral and ethical aspects have been studied as virtuous living. The study of virtue has a prominent place because the meaning of a good life or life well lived is strongly connected to traits like honesty, forgiveness, compassion, gratitude and wisdom. It is found that expressing human virtues contributes to individual well-being and well-being of others. Peterson and Seligman's work on character strengths and virtues already discussed in an earlier section is relevant in this context as well. In this sense religion has become an important topic within positive psychology.

#### **Self Assessment Questions 5**

1. What is psychoneuroimmunology?
2. Define posttraumatic growth.
3. Which therapy views symptoms of many mental disorders as manifestation of irrational beliefs and thinking?
4. What are the five dimensions of social well-being?

### **1.8 LET US SUM UP**

Positive psychology emerged within our discipline in the New Millennium to study scientifically the nature of happiness, well-being and flourishing and what conditions facilitate and ensure them. Martin Seligman ushered in this new field inquiry along with likeminded psychologists. The aim is to help people improve the quality of their life by providing scientifically valid information regarding what constitutes well-being and how to achieve that. In the past two decades (year 2000 to 2021) as the field has developed and matured into its adulthood, more researches have been undertaken on its three main focus viz., understanding of positive emotions, positive traits and positive institutions. Several books have hit the stands in book stores and hundreds of research articles in academic journals and popular articles also in print, electronic and social media have been published.

In addition, the very understanding of what should define the field has also changed. Seligman gave importance to certain elements which he termed as PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationship, meaning and achievement) as the building blocks of flourishing. Paul Wong, another psychologist with humanistic-existential orientation, emphasized on the importance of including struggles of human existence and consequent pain and suffering in deriving meaning for life and defining well-being and flourishing. This extended the scope of positive psychology. He also termed his vision as the 'second wave' or PP 2 and Seligman's vision as PP 1.

Positive psychology is related to other disciplines of social sciences and also with different branches within psychology itself. The research outcomes of the last two decades demonstrate that human beings within and across societies and

cultures have different notions of what happiness and well-being mean. It is also found that pursuit of money and acquisition of wealth affect our happiness and sense of well-being only up to a point. In other words, the external and objective sources do not play a greater role in our feeling of happiness and well-being. Inputs from other branches of psychology support this view. In brief, it is now realized by many that sustainable happiness and well-being is intrinsic rather than dependent on extrinsic factors.

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## 1.9 KEY WORDS

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**Positive Psychology** is the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive, and results in optimal functioning.

**Existential Positive Psychology** emphasizes on the importance of pain, suffering and sorrow in human existence and their relevance in defining what is happiness, well-being and meaningful living

**Second Wave of PP** views that suffering is as much required for flourishing and growth as the experience of positive emotions.

**Well-being** is more than just happiness. In addition to feeling satisfied and happy, well-being means developing as a person, being fulfilled, and making a contribution to the community.

**Broaden and build theory** postulates that positive emotions like joy, contentment, interest, love, and pride broaden people's thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources.

**Posttraumatic growth** refers to positive growth that can occur as a result of traumatic experiences like serious illness, loss of a loved one, or a major accident or disability.

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## 1.10 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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### Answers to Self Assessment Questions 1

1. Martin Seligman
2. 'Akumal Manifesto' is also known as the 'Positive Psychology Manifesto' which was drafted at Akumal, Mexico in two meetings held in January 1999 and in January 2000. Authored by Kenneth Sheldon, Barbara Fredrickson, Kevin Rathunde, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Jonathan Haidt, it highlighted the focus on positive psychology.
3. Carol Ryff
4. Existential Positive Psychology

### Answers to Self Assessment Questions 2

1. True
2. positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions.

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3. Paul T. Wong
4. Viktor Frankl
5. The second wave of PP emphasizes that suffering is as much required for flourishing and growth as the experience of positive emotions.

**Answers to Self Assessment Questions 3**

1. positive and negative affect; and life satisfaction
2. six
3. Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment
4. True

**Answers to Self Assessment Questions 4**

1. External history of a discipline refers to the social and cultural events and the context in which a particular discipline emerged.
2. True
3. Csikszentmihalyi
4. Bhutan

**Answers to Self Assessment Questions 5**

1. Psychoneuroimmunology refers to the study of complex interaction between our negative emotional states, and our brain, nervous system, endocrine system and the immune system, leading to negative impact on our health.
2. Posttraumatic growth refers to positive growth that can occur as a result of traumatic experiences like serious illness, loss of a loved one, or a major accident or disability.
3. Cognitive therapy
4. social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization and social acceptance.

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**1.11 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

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1. Compare and contrast the aims, objectives and scope of PP 1 and PP 2.
2. Throw light on the historical context of the development of the field of positive psychology.
3. Explain the interrelation between clinical psychology and positive psychology.
4. How positive psychology is related to the field of developmental psychology?



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**Web Links**

[www.positivepsychology.com](http://www.positivepsychology.com)

<https://positivepsychology.com/positive-psychology-interventions/>.